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Kennedys, Humphrey Flew CIA

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This is the entrance to Fairways Corp. office at Page Terminal, National Airport.

Tucked away in a corner of National Airport, Fairways Corp. has pursued a modest business of ferrying charter air passengers while actually serving for a number of years as a secret shuttle service for agents of the Central Intelligence Agency, intelligence sources say.

Political figures such as Hubert H. Humphrey and John and Robert Kennedy apparently paid full fare to ride Fairways' planes in the 1950s and 1960s, reportedly unaware that they were helping provide a legitimate cover for what sources say was an air charter service owned and operated by the CIA.

Fairways' current president and chief pilot, Charles W. Bing, 51, said he has no knowledge of any connection between his company and the top-secret spy agency. The company does ferry government officials in uniform and civilian clothes as part of a major contract with the Navy, he said. He did not rule out that some of those government passengers might be connected with the CIA.

A spokesman for the Defense Department said department records going back to 1963 "do not show Fairways Corp. as having received a DOD contract for greater than $10,000." A spokesman for the Navy Department said late yesterday after a day-long investigation he had not yet been able to determine if the Navy had a contract with Fairways.

Asked about this, Bing indicated the company's contract with the Navy was for more than $10,000, but declined further comment.

A spokesman for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which is investigating the CIA, said CIA "proprietary companies are an area the committee has been authorized to look into. I cannot answer a question on Fairways Corp. specifically, but I can say this is in an area we are looking into."

According to Bing, Fairways is the creation of Woodrow W. (Woody) Edmondson, a stunt pilot from Lynchburg, Va., who set up Fairways at National Airport in the early 1950s with the help of other Lynchburg businessmen, Bing said.

Edmondson ran the company until his retirement last year, Bing said. Now living in Myrtle Beach, S.C., Edmondson was on a golfing vacation yesterday and could not be reached, his wife said.

Since a May 30 ABC-TV special on the CIA connecting the agency with Fairways, Bing has received several phone calls from newsmen and other curious citizens.

The three Fairways aircraft carry 14 to 19 passengers each and are served by a total staff of four pilots and two office workers.

According to intelligence sources, the CIA has in the past used the air charter company to ferry agency executives to places like Camp Peary, an agency training base outside Williamsburg, Va.

"We've flown people down to Williamsburg," said Bing, adding he had no idea whether his passengers were bound for Camp Peary or not.

Sources suggested that the CIA's connection with Fairways was one piece of information deleted by court order from a best-selling book about the agency at the insistence of CIA officials. The book, "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence" by Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, includes the following paragraph in a chapter discussing alleged CIA-owned airlines such as Air America and Southern Air Transport:

"Former Director (Richard) Helms, however, refused to fly (DELETED) because he believed that its commercial cover was too transparent. He preferred instead to travel on legitimate commercial airlines. Less reluctant was Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who often used (DELETED) Gulfstream during his 1968 presidential campaign.

Bing said that one of Fairways' three planes is a Grumman American Gulfstream 1 and that the airline has flown Humphrey. A spokesman for Humphrey said the senator had taken some charter flights in 1968 booked through Page Airways Inc., a charter service at National Airport that occasionally arranges flights for Fairways. "The senator doesn't recall flying on any CIA-owned air charters," the spokesman said.